GAZETTE
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
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A weekly publication for staff

# Festival's First Week Offers Glimpse of Many Worlds

## The 10-day festival truly has something for everyone.

**BY WENDI A. MALONEY**

The theme of this year's book festival is "Open a Book, Open the World." The past week's author conversations likely introduced a new world or two to just about everyone who listened in. But beyond opening entirely new vistas, for many of us, the festival also hinted at fresh ways of looking at subjects we thought we knew well – from how best to make life decisions to moments in American history.

"It's like the holidays this time of year," Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden said of the book festival. The live portion kicked off last Friday afternoon following release in the morning of 35 on-demand videos on the book festival website.

Since then, 31 live online presentations have showcased 52 authors from across genres – adult and children's fiction, history, science, cooking, current events – with more to come through Sunday. In total, more than 100 authors will appear.

The high point of the festival's kickoff day, Sept. 17, was an exchange between Hayden and actor LeVar Burton, host of the Sept. 12 PBS television special previewing the festival. The beloved literacy advocate – his "Reading Rainbow" on PBS Kids received a dozen Daytime Emmys – spoke about how he came to be a booklover.

**The festival's kickoff on Sept. 17 concluded with a live conversation between Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden and LeVar Burton.**

"My identity as a reader, Dr. Hayden," Burton said, "was forged by my mother, Erma Gene Christian."

An English teacher who had a second career in social work, Burton's mother ran a house in which reading was mandatory.

"I like to say that in Erma Gene's house, you either read a book, or you got hit in the head with one. But you were going to have an experience with the written word," Burton joked.

The first fictional world to draw Burton in was Rudyard Kipling's "Captains Courageous," he recalled, and he felt profoundly sad when he finished it. "I was depressed because I was leaving the world that I had become so attached to."

Now he slows down when he's reading a good piece of fiction to "sort of forestall that inevitable sense of sadness that will descend."

A podcast series in which Burton reads short stories is now in its 10th season, and he started LeVar Burton's Book Club online in May. His first pick was "Go Tell It on the Mountain" by James Baldwin.

"The man was not only a brilliant writer, he was a brilliant thinker," Burton said. "His thoughts and ideas continue to inspire me and millions around the world."

Just before Burton's interview, singer-songwriter and philan-

**NBF, CONTINUED ON 10**

## INSIDE

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Sign up here.

**Sept. 28 and Oct. 5**
**Jefferson carriage entrance circle (drive through)**
**9 a.m. to 2 p.m.**

**Sept. 29, 30 and Oct. 1, 6, 7, 8**
**Montpelier Room, Madison Building**
**9 a.m. to 4 p.m.**

Shots will also be offered soon at the Taylor Street annex and on the Packard Campus.

Questions? Contact HSD at hso@loc.gov.

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GAZETTE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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Publications Editor

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Writer-Editor

**CONTRIBUTING EDITORS**
Deanna McCray-James, calendar
Kia Campbell, Moving On
Lisa Davis, donated leave

**PROOFREADER**
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Ashley Jones

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An official publication of the Library of Congress, The Gazette encourages Library managers and staff to submit articles and photographs of general interest. Submissions will be edited to convey the most necessary information.

Back issues of The Gazette in print are available in the Communications Office, LM 143. Electronic archived issues and a color PDF file of the current issue are available online at loc.gov/staff/gazette.

**GAZETTE WELCOMES LETTERS FROM STAFF**
Staff members are invited to use the Gazette for lively and thoughtful debate relevant to Library issues. Letters must be signed by the author, whose place of work and telephone extension should be included so we can verify authorship. If a letter calls for management response, an explanation of a policy or actions or clarification of fact, we will ask for management response.–Ed.

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Washington, DC 20540-1620
**Editorial:** Mark Hartsell, 7-9194, mhartsell@loc.gov, or Wendi Maloney, 7-0979, wmal@loc.gov
**Design and production:** Ashley Jones, 7-9193, gaze@loc.gov
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**GAZETTE DEADLINES**
The deadline for editorial copy for the Oct. 8 Gazette is Wednesday, Sept. 29.

Email editorial copy and letters to the editor to mhartsell@loc.gov and wmal@loc.gov.

To promote events through the Library's online calendar (www.loc.gov/loc/events) and the Gazette Calendar, email event and contact information to calendar@loc.gov by 9 a.m. Monday of the week of publication.

Boxed announcements should be submitted electronically (text files) by 9 a.m. Monday the week of publication to mhartsell@loc.gov and wmal@loc.gov.

# Williams Receives Library Prize for American Fiction

## The highly acclaimed author said she finds writing challenging.

**BY SHERYL RIVETT**

It might surprise fans of Joy Williams' cryptic, often humorous work to learn she has "never enjoyed writing." Remarkably, she rarely edits her short stories, only longer work, and admits adding new characters when feeling stuck. Her stories still unfold via typewriter (the latest a Hermes 3000 with seafoam-colored keys). And while she prefers to write short stories, her latest novel, "Harrow," didn't fit into the short-story format.

During the National Book Festival this year, Williams received the Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction. Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden conferred Williams' award, describing her as a "singular presence in American letters."

"When you open a Joy Williams book," Hayden said, "you know you are in for a unique and rewarding experience."

Williams' canon of work includes five collections of short stories, two works of nonfiction and five novels. She is the recipient of Pulitzer and National Book Award nominations and the Rea Award for the Short Story. Williams was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2008. Still, she said, she finds the process of writing difficult.

"Certainly, you have to have a great respect and love of words," Williams said during her festival conversation with Robert Casper of the Literary Initiatives Office.

Dressed in black and wearing her signature prescription sunglasses, Williams discussed her approach to writing and influences from her childhood growing up in Maine as the only child of a Congregational minister and granddaughter of a Welsh Baptist preacher.


**Joy Williams speaks with Robert Casper of the Literary Initiatives Office.**

"I got a sense of rhythm from the ritual of the liturgy," Williams said. "It's comfort and it's tragic. It's frightening. It's scary. This weird comfort – the church service and the hymns."

Reading from a folded piece of paper, Williams shared eight tips for writing short stories, ending with the disclaimer that they are "so abstract, but not very helpful."

The tips included literary elements readers enjoy most in Williams' work, such as "a clean, clear surface with much disturbance below"; "interior voices which are or will become wildly exterior"; "control throughout"; and "a spiritual level underneath."

Williams' writing is often described as containing bleak humor and wit, with an economy of words. Her stories excavate the human experiences of despair and loneliness, while offering surprising moments of irony or subtle social commentary. Her writer's eye examines the world around us, using the simplest of sentences to convey deep meaning and devastating truths.

Casper described her writing as "crystalline, powerful and darkly comic," adding that Williams' characters "speak in really profound, even biblical, ways."

"When you start writing that first page, there are so many forms and shapes around you," Williams shared. "What somebody said yesterday, the hopes you have for the story. Memory. Things from the past. Then all of that drops away; you as a writer disappear."

She continued: "You have to go back into that room every day and allow yourself to disappear. That lack of control, those gifts. The senses sometimes. Where do they come from? You just have to be accepting of them, open to them."

Williams said the novel wants to befriend you, while the short story almost never does, and she shared that imagination will be "very important in the coming years with this climate disaster."

Near the end of the conversation, Williams recited lines from an Isaac Watts hymn, perfectly encapsulating her often wild and surprising fiction that has garnered so many awards: "Let every creature rise and bring peculiar honors to our king."

"I love those lines," Williams exclaimed. "I think it's just what an artist does. They are peculiar lines, peculiar gifts. Strange gifts." ■

# ‘The Plague Year,’ and What We Learned in It

## A Pulitzer Prize winner documents the pandemic in real time.

**BY MARK HARTSELL**

Just two years ago, Lawrence Wright was researching a novel about a fictional pandemic and asked the experts a prescient question: Considering all the technological and medical advances, would we be better able to stop a pandemic today than our ancestors were a century ago during the 1918 influenza pandemic?

No, the answer came. Absent a vaccine or an effective therapeutic, we’d be worse off. “Because of modern transportation,” Wright said, “we would have a global pandemic almost instantly.”

And so it came to pass. In 2020, the COVID-19 virus rapidly spread from China across the globe and to date has killed over 4.7 million people worldwide and nearly 700,000 in the United States.

Wright, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of “The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11,” decided to document this new crisis as it unfolded.

“There’s not a single part of our society that hasn’t been touched by COVID. … I felt compelled to try to grab as much as I could and try to understand it while it was happening,” Wright said Monday at the National Book Festival.

The result of that effort is “The Plague Year: America in the Time of COVID,” a book that takes readers inside the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), into the White House, to hospital wards where medical staff try to save the stricken, into businesses around the country struggling to stay afloat.

Wright appeared at the festival to discuss his book in an interview with David Rubenstein, the festival’s co-chairman and the chairman of the James Madison Council, the Library’s private-sector advisory group.

**David Rubenstein, the festival’s co-chairman (left), interviews Lawrence Wright live on Monday afternoon.**

Wright pointed to a series of missteps that, had they not occurred, might have held the U.S. death toll to tens of thousands rather than hundreds of thousands – a lack of transparency on the part of China; failures of institutions such as the CDC, where faulty test kits cost weeks of valuable time in combating the virus; and failures of the White House to promote use of masks and foster a sense of trust in government.

Alongside all the faults came astonishing success.

The production of a vaccine in such a short time, Wright said, was “a triumph of medical science.”

The earliest expectation that we’d have a vaccine in the arms of Americans, he noted, was a year and a half. Yet, Barney Graham of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and Jason McClellan of the University of Texas produced a vaccine just days after receiving the genetic sequence of the virus in January 2020. Six weeks later, Wright said, Moderna was injecting volunteers in its first trial.

“Nothing – nothing – in immunology history compares with that,” he said.

The toll in lives has been enormous. But Wright learned that there is another toll that hasn’t been fully realized.

“I ran into so many people whose lives have been totally torn apart,” he said. “I don’t think I appreciated the depth of the wound that this disease has caused America.”

The tragedy of the bubonic plague in 14th-century Europe – the “Black Death” killed about one-third of the continent’s population – ultimately helped produce the Renaissance. Likewise, Wright said, some good still might come of the COVID pandemic.

“I think of the coronavirus as being like an X-ray, and you can see into your society and in all the broken places,” he said. “So we know now what kind of country we are, and we see how shattered we’ve been by this. But we have the opportunity to repair ourselves because we know what needs to be done.” ■

# Teens Ask Questions, Lead Interviews This Year

## Young readers of all backgrounds are sure to find themselves among this year's offerings.

**BY SASHA DOWDY AND MONICA VALENTINE**

This year's National Book Festival is inventive in many ways, not least in the format of its children's and teen programming.

A mix of live and on-demand special features include teens interviewing young adult authors, vignettes highlighting kid-friendly items from the Library's digital collections and a Q&A with National Ambassador for Young People's Literature Jason Reynolds, moderated by local teens.

And there's more: Upcoming this weekend are nine live online author conversations with children's and teen authors.

On-demand videos for children offer a look into many worlds, reflecting the festival theme, "Open a Book, Open the World." Best-selling author Dan Gutman takes readers through the life of Houdini and teaches a magic trick; Broadway star Ali Stroker and her co-author, Stacy Davidowitz, geek out over musicals; Derrick Barnes recounts the influence of rap on his writing; and teen author Brayden Harrington shares his experience as a kid with a stutter.

Twelve students from nine states nationwide conducted eight of the prerecorded interviews featuring authors for teens, supported by Library staff. The group included six Library teen interns and six student ambassadors who participated in Reynolds' 2020-21 national ambassador project "Grab the Mic." The Library's six summer teen interns also created a short video for their peers highlighting their favorite resources from across the Library.


**Washington, D.C., area teens Courtney Kim and Brandon Marshall interviewed Jason Reynolds on Saturday.**

The teen genre interviews are compelling. We encourage you and the young people you know to watch and witness the soul connection made by interviewer Adeline Yu with author Traci Chee as they discuss shared experiences as Asian Americans.

Listen to Yusuf Salaam, one of the Exonerated Five – youths wrongfully imprisoned for the 1989 Central Park jogger attack – as he talks with his co-author, Ibi Zoboi, about preservation of stories.

Or watch the interview with Kekla Magoon as she takes readers through misrepresentation of the Black Panther movement, the repression of Black women's voices and the origins of the conversations about race and civil rights that are ongoing today.

In a live interview on Sept. 18 with teens Courtney Kim and Brandon Marshall, Reynolds described his role as national ambassador as the "cheerleader for literature for this the country," and he reflected on the challenges of achieving that digitally during the pandemic.

Kim and Marshall fielded questions from readers across the country and asked a few of their own. In response to a Detroit reader's query about Reynolds' inspiration to write, Reynolds shared that he "leads a curious life" that fuels his inspiration. He also reported being inspired by "young people pushing through COVID" with "grit and resilience."

Asked about his popular "Write, Right, Rite" videos series, Reynolds said the videos are meant as "imagination prompts" rather than writing prompts. Stressing the need for creativity, he observed that we need young people to "grow up to be creators, not just workers."

Asked by Kim about his perception of what youth means, he offered that it's "an energy more so than an age range."

He added: "Youth learning things for the first time are changing them as they are learning them. … If you lose your youth, you stop growing."

View a recording of Reynolds' interview – and all other children's and teen content – and participate in the nine live conversations upcoming tomorrow and Sunday on the festival website: loc.gov/bookfest ■

# Reynolds to Serve Third Term as National Ambassador

## The advocate for creativity looks forward to connecting with young people in person.

Shawn Miller

**Jason Reynolds with Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden at the start of his first term in 2020.**

The Library and Every Child a Reader announced on Monday that Jason Reynolds' term as national ambassador for young people's literature will be extended to include a third year – for the first time in the history of the program.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Reynolds connected virtually with thousands of students in rural areas of the country to engage in meaningful discussions. In 2022, Reynolds will meet in person with students in rural communities to continue his work of encouraging young people to share their own narratives.

In addition, Reynolds will create an archive of student voices, encouraging students to share their creations through his "Grab the Mic: Tell Your Story" platform.

Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden said she is elated Reynolds will continue as the national ambassador, and she looks forward to seeing how he will expand his message.

"Grab the Mic," she said, has "proven that connecting with kids on their level empowers real-world growth in reading and writing."

"If the goal has changed at all," Reynolds said of his third year, "it's to be even more present in the lives of the young people I'm serving. More storytelling, more cultural exchange, more creativity, more connection – and this time, in person."

Reynolds discussed plans for his third year in an interview on NPR's TED Radio Hour podcast, one of the partner National Book Festival programs this year. Reynolds also engaged in a live interview with teen moderators during the festival (see page 5).

In November and December, Reynolds will embark on his third virtual tour as national ambassador. Participating schools were selected from more than 200 proposals and include Bald Eagle Area High School (Wingate, Pennsylvania); Bronson Jr./Sr. High School (Bronson, Michigan); ESSDACK (McPherson, Kansas); Gowanda Central Schools (Gowanda, New York); Johnson High School (Laredo, Texas); Los Fresnos Consolidated Independent School District (Los Fresnos, Texas); Marshall High School (Marshall, Wisconsin); and Yamhill Carlton School District (Yamhill, Oregon).

In support of the tour, the Library purchased paperback copies of Reynolds' recent novel, "Look Both Ways: A Tale Told in Ten Blocks," for participating schools with the generous support of Dollar General Literacy Foundation. Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing will also continue its support of the national ambassador program.

During the pandemic, Reynolds quickly pivoted his role as ambassador to the virtual landscape. His first two virtual ambassador-ship tours connected him with thousands of students across the country – from Gillette, Wyoming, to Leland, Mississippi; Pine Ridge, South Dakota, to New Hope, Minnesota.

In April 2020, in coordination with the Library, Reynolds debuted a 30-part video series for kids, "Write, Right, Rite." The videos offer fun and engaging prompts to express creativity. In March 2020, Reynolds launched "Brain Yoga," a weekly Instagram Live video series during which he invited young people to join him onscreen to participate in a game that stretched the imagination.

Reynolds is a New York Times bestselling author, a Newbery Award Honoree, a Printz Award honoree, a two-time National Book Award finalist, a Kirkus Award winner, a Carnegie Medal winner, a two-time Walter Dean Myers Award winner, an NAACP Image Award winner and the recipient of multiple Coretta Scott King Award honors. ■

## Kazuo Ishiguro

Nobel laureate and Booker Prize-winning author Kazuo Ishiguro, making a headlining appearance at this year's festival, was asked why so many of his central characters work in service-oriented jobs.

A metaphor, he said, for the lives most of us lead.

Ishiguro's haunting works include "The Remains of the Day," "Never Let Me Go" and his newest, "Klara and the Sun." In each, the central character works in service to others. In "Remains," it's an English butler on an estate; in "Never," a nurse who helps coordinate organ donations; in "Klara," it's a robot created in the form of a little girl to help her owners avoid loneliness and heartbreak.

Ishiguro joined the online festival from his home in London. In a conversation with Marie Arana, the Library's former literary director, he said the "person-in-service" archetype – mostly arrived at unconsciously – represents people living small lives beneath the waves of history. They "torture themselves" in a struggle to be good, decent people in the hopes that it will contribute to a larger good.

"In every endeavor, we care about this so much, and this is what fascinates me about people, and it touches me about people," he said. "And so I often show people in service because that is such a huge part of who we are." ■

*–Neely Tucker*

## Noé Álvarez, Maria Hinojosa

Hispanics are the second largest group in America, yet they continue struggling to be seen and heard, said Latino authors Noé Álvarez (pictured above) and Maria Hinojosa in a live conversation on Sunday with journalist María Elena Salinas.

Álvarez, author of "Spirit Run: A 6,000-Mile Marathon Through North America's Stolen Land," dropped out of college in 2004 and joined a marathon that unites indigenous runners from Canada to Guatemala. His debut book chronicles that journey, his reconnection to the land and his upbringing as the son of Mexican immigrant fruit packers in Yakima, Washington.

"I wrote the book from the perspective of living on the margins and trying to find a place on the land that didn't always want you there," Álvarez said.

Mexican-born Hinojosa, a journalist on the immigration beat for decades, wrote "Once I Was You: A Memoir of Love and Hate in a Torn America."

She decried what she labeled as the ongoing invisibility of Hispanics despite their long presence in the country and widespread documentation of their experience.

"We want the mainstream to be seeing us not because it makes us feel good, but because it's [good] for the future of this country," she said. ■

*–María Peña*

## Isabel Wilkerson

When researching and writing her most recent book, "Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents," Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author Isabel Wilkerson had no way to know its release would be amid a pandemic and social unrest. Still, she found the timing inspired.

Following "The Warmth of Other Suns," her earlier book about the northward migration of African Americans, Wilkerson's narrative weaves fact-based research with storytelling. Her goal was to "shine a light on" the caste system of the United States "so that we can see beneath what we thought we might know about the hierarchy that we have inherited," she said, and "begin the work together to dismantle this hierarchy, to dismantle the inequities that are built into our society."

That process starts with awareness, Wilkerson said. "In the last few years, [we] have heard people say, 'I don't recognize my country. This is not America. This is not what America stands for.' And whenever I hear that, I'm reminded that not enough of us know our country's true history."

Wilkerson said she approached the book as an interdisciplinary discussion of the country's lesser-known history. Ultimately, it's a plea "to the country and, in fact, to humanity to recognize the divisions that we've inherited." She underscored: "They were not your direct doing, but it is your responsibility once you take possession." ■

*–Nicole Lamberson*

# A Look at Misbehaving Animals and Bird Brains

**BY BAILEY CAHALL**

Did you know that a two degree increase in temperature can reduce a bear's hibernation period by two weeks? How about the fact that the male palm cockatoo, a bird native to Australia and New Guinea, is the only species besides humans to create tools solely for musical purposes? These details were shared during two festival conversations focused on the natural world.

The first discussion, featuring authors Mary Roach ("Fuzz: When Nature Breaks the Law") and Suzanne Simard ("Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest"), examined how humans can, and should, adjust our principles to ensure we're living sustainably with the animals and plants around us.

Jennifer Ackerman, author of "The Bird Way: A New Look at How Birds Talk, Work, Play, Parent and Think," and David Allen Sibley, author of "What It's Like to Be a Bird: From Flying to Nesting, Eating to Singing–What Birds Are Doing, and Why," took part in the second panel. It looked at bird intelligence, including some "smarts" even we don't have. As Sibley noted, the insult of having a "bird brain" is an incredibly inaccurate analogy.

**Jennifer Ackerman talks birds with David Allen Sibley.**

The four authors, who investigate different aspects of the natural world, have similar suggestions for readers who want to do something about the negative impacts we have on other species, whether flora or fauna.

One of the easiest things to do, especially as fall approaches, is to not worry about raking your leaves. Birds, it turns out, like leaf litter.

Simard, for her part, recommends getting out and really connecting with nature, whether that's sitting down and honoring the presence of a tree or watching ants crawling in soil. Or perhaps it's listening to the crunching of leaves – the ones you aren't raking – under your feet. ■

# Initiative Takes Festival to Communities Across U.S.

## Organizations, affiliate Centers for the Book host supporting events.

**BY LEAH KNOBEL**

The 2021 National Book Festival is being brought to communities across the country by local Library partners.

The Festival Near You, a new initiative of this year's festival, invited organizations around the U.S. to host events in conjunction with the book festival.

Lee Ann Potter, director of Professional Learning and Outreach Initiatives at the Library, realized the Library's partnerships were an untapped resource for expanding access to the festival.

Potter and her colleagues reached out to existing partners, including affiliate Centers for the Book, colleagues at other federal cultural institutions, Library grantees, the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled network and more.

The result is a slate of 43 events hosted by organizations in 13 states and the District of Columbia, all of which are listed on the festival website.

"The initiative ensures the National Book Festival is true to its name – a national festival," Potter said.

Groton Public Library in Groton, Connecticut, is one of the organizations. Jessica Franco, teen and workforce development specialist at Groton library, quickly saw an opportunity to utilize festival videos for its book club focused on antiracism books hosted at the local high school.

Before the summer break, the club had just finished reading "Punching the Air," by Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam. Zoboi and Salaam, a prison reform activist and one of the Exonerated Five, appear in one of the dozens of video-on-demand conversations at the festival. Franco felt it was an excellent way to kick off their club for the new school year.

"Students were particularly moved by this book, so much so that our discussions grew from the fiction story to the Exonerated Five themselves," said Franco. "The watch party is an excellent way for us to celebrate last year's reads, while introducing new students to the book club." ■

# Festival Is an All-Hands-on-Deck Endeavor

## Staff across the Library are contributing to the festival's success.

**BY WENDI A. MALONEY**

The phrase "it takes a village," usually applied to child-rearing, is now a cliché. However trite, it's an apt description of the huge effort it takes to put together a National Book Festival.

This year, hundreds of staff members from across the Library devoted many months and countless hours to the festival's 21st rendition.

"It's been a lot of individuals putting in a tremendous amount of work," Jarrod MacNeil, director of the Signature Programs Office, said. He and his staff oversee the festival's production.

Starting last Friday through Sept. 26, booklovers near and far have a chance to hear from more than 100 authors, poets and writers. As festivalgoers select on-demand videos to view or take part in live conversations with authors, their experience has been mostly seamless.

Behind the scenes, however, it took a lot to get there. "The amount of collaboration needed to produce a program of this magnitude is astounding," MacNeil said.

The Literary Initiatives Office in the Center for Learning, Literacy and Engagement (CLLE) secures authors and develops programming for the festival, an effort that unfolds over months and demands an enormous amount of outreach.

This year, in selecting session moderators, Literary Initiatives worked with the Office of Communications to identify journalists from among the festival's partners.

The Communications Office reached out to these partners and supported multiple festival-associated offerings with them – an NPR podcast series, Washington Post Live author interviews, a national PBS broadcast and regional PBS events. To drum up interest, Communications staff mounted the most extensive festival social media campaign to date this year and placed ads strategically in diverse media.

The Events Office also did heavy lifting. Its staff was instrumental, MacNeil said, in helping to schedule and facilitate author recordings – a complicated task given that the entire festival with the exception of two events is virtual.

Because of the festival's virtual nature, the Multimedia Group is vital to its success. Its staff recorded 45 videos, produced materials and graphics for social media and edited two dozen staff-developed video presentations. The videos accompany author conversations and highlight associated Library holdings and programs.

This week, yet other expert staff led interactive sessions with public audiences focusing on different aspects of the Library's collections and services: art and the written word, copyright, comic books, genealogy.

Not least is the contribution of the Office of the Chief Information Officer. Its staff collaborate on developing the festival website, provide network connectivity, troubleshoot technical issues throughout the festival and gather and report metrics on engagement.

Yet other behind-the-scenes staff review incoming questions from the public for compliance with Library policy, answer queries about navigating the festival and carry out other essential tasks.

This year, CLLE's Informal Learning Office also supported children's and teen programming, and its Professional Learning and Outreach Initiatives Office worked with state Center for the Book affiliates to develop new Festival Near You events across the country (see page 8).

"There are individuals from every part of the Library who are contributors – to the content, to the management, to the oversight and to the overall facilitation of the festival," MacNeil said. "It is truly a Librarywide initiative." ■

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NBF, CONTINUED FROM 1

thropist Dolly Parton made a cameo appearance. The Library announced earlier this month that her Imagination Library won the 2021 David M. Rubenstein Prize, the Library's top literacy award.

"This award means a lot to me, because I started this program in honor of my daddy, who never learned to read and write," Parton said. "I know that he is smiling from above on this one."

Other kickoff day talks delved into the lived experiences of Native Americans, the culture of Silicon Valley and the forces driving America's devastating opioid epidemic.

In the morning, actor and festival author Michael J. Fox spoke with Washington Post reporter Jonathan Capehart about his new memoir, "No Time Like the Future: An Optimist Considers Mortality."

The Washington Post Live interview was one of several partner programs – also including an NPR podcast series, regional PBS broadcasts and events in communities nationwide – launched this year to reach new audiences.

Fox talked about the unexpected joy of his acting career after symptoms from Parkinson's disease – he was diagnosed in 1991 – started to affect him.

He came to use his "Parkinson's filter," he said, to interpret characters' vulnerabilities. "In a sense, everyone has Parkinson's. It's just finding that person's Parkinson's, whatever that is."

All the live online conversations this year have their own time slot, so festival fans don't have to skip one author to see another. In fact, they don't have to miss out at all since all festival content – including recordings of live conversations and a Sept. 21 in-person event about crosswords in the Coolidge (more to come about that next week) – will remain on the website.

Festivalgoers who participate in real time have rich on-demand choices to choose from between sessions – dozens of prerecorded author interviews, some accompanied by staff presentations of Library holdings, and also Great Reads from Great Places interviews of regional authors by state Center for the Book affiliates.

They can also opt between sessions to buy featured books from the Politics & Prose online bookstore or purchase T-shirts or a festival poster from the Library Shop.

A highlight of the festival's on-demand content is the virtual conferral of the Library's Prize for American Fiction on legendary author Joy Williams. "She opens new worlds for us with her bracing yet compassionate depiction of everyday life," Hayden said before presenting the prize.

"I am so thrilled and so grateful," Williams responded on accepting it.

Just like the festival's live presentations, on-demand content crosses genres and subjects. There is literally something for everyone – graphic novels, gothic horror, science fiction, self-help, presidential biography, misbehaving animals and little-known poets of the Harlem Renaissance, to name just a few.

In one video, Adam Grant, a University of Pennsylvania organizational psychologist, speaks with BBC news anchor Mishal Husain about his new book, "Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know."

"The more intelligent you are, the more reasons you can find to convince yourself that your beliefs are true," he said.

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Annette Gordon-Reed speaks with Eric Deggans of NPR in another. Her latest book, "On Juneteenth," examines the influence of race on Texas' development through the lens of her memories of growing up in the state.

"We're all a part of history," she said, "and we can tell that story through our family lives."

As always, the festival offers plentiful and outstanding children's and teen content on subjects from being Muslim in America, ableism and wrongful incarceration to a thriller involving students at an elite prep school.

Teen author Brayden Harrington wrote "Brayden Speaks Up: How One Boy Inspired the Nation" after receiving much attention at the Democratic National Convention for his speech citing a challenge he shares with President Joe Biden: stuttering.

He met Biden when his father dragged him to a campaign rally – "I didn't really like politics," he said.

But after talking with Biden, his perspective changed. "I felt like I was in a place where I could belong," he said. "It made me feel way better about myself."

To bring the Library and its treasures front and center, staff experts hosted four live online sessions this week – a fifth is happening this afternoon – introducing collections and services.

Also coming up, on Saturday and Sunday, nine live online sessions will showcase children's and teen authors, while other presentations will cover more great books in genres including history, fiction and current events. The festival concludes on Sept. 26 with a live conversation among poets Claudia Rankine, Phillip B. Williams and Kevin Young.

Going back to the kickoff, at the start of her conversation with Burton on Sept. 17, Hayden made an important announcement: Next year's book festival will take place on Labor Day weekend in the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C.

Doubtless, many booklovers look forward to returning to the happy chaos of an in-person celebration after two years in which the pandemic forced the festival online. But for those who can't travel to D.C., the Librarian had reassurance: "Don't worry," she said, "we will continue to make this a virtual festival so everyone across the country can enjoy this literary event." ■